



**City of
Northampton**

Pamela Powers <ppowers@northamptonma.gov>

Downtown Business Climate Study

1 message

Rebecca Robbins <rebeccamrobbins@yahoo.com>

Tue, Jul 19, 2016 at 11:00 AM

To: ppowers@northamptonma.gov, "dennis Bidwell gisciarr@northamptonma.gov" <dbidwell@bidwelladvisors.com>

Dear Members of the Committee on Community Resources,

I am writing to express concerns I have as a business owner in Northampton. It is my hope that there will be some real change after all the meetings and time spent trying to understand the needs of the businesses and workers in our town. Many opinions have been expressed. I will add mine to the choir.

Northampton is full of small businesses. These businesses are a big part of downtown's charm. Small businesses are under more financial pressures than ever. New laws have significantly increased the cost of doing business. First, there was mandatory health insurance, then the .075 meals tax (paid by consumer but depresses what businesses can charge), then paid sick time. The laws accomplish good things, but are VERY costly to employers.

Additionally, on-line competition is tougher than ever. Most items can be ordered from Amazon Prime with "free" shipping and will arrive within 36 hours. That is a tough act to follow! Why would a consumer go to the hassle of driving to town, finding parking, finding enough coins for a meter, walking to the meter, walking back to the car with their meter ticket, walking to their store of choice while being harassed for signatures, donations and spare change, paying more at a brick and mortar store, walking back through the do-gooders and panhandlers who ask you again because they forgot they already asked you, finding you got a ticket and driving home? Lots of people do go through this ordeal every day. I argue though, that MANY consumers are not coming to downtown because of the very hindrances listed above.

Sure, our independent stores offer some unique products, services or experiences not to be found on-line, but it's super hard. Fewer dollars are finding their way to the bottom line.

Wouldn't it be great if you could go shopping or dining downtown just for the simple pleasure of it? Right now it's a political act. You shop because you want to preserve your town. You shop downtown as an act of resistance against globalization. Not everyone is up for that.

Is there a way visitors to Northampton could walk solicitation-free down our streets? Panhandlers seem to be getting the bulk of the blame, but it is just as annoying to be approached for donations and signatures. An isolated solicitation is not a big deal, but yesterday I had to turn down 7 different people asking me for something on my walk down Main Street from Thorne's to CVS.

I ask the city council to please do anything within its powers to help make downtown commerce easy, or at least to not enact anything that would make commerce more challenging than it already is.

This brings me to my other concern - I worry that a wage theft ordinance would unduly burden both the city and its businesses. The cost of doing a payroll audit of a business is massive to both parties. If the city is as strapped for finances as it often claims to be - isn't this sort of thing best left to the organizations that already exist to police wage theft? Also, all of the employees of a business would suffer were the business to be denied a permit (and close) because of a wage theft issue. The state handles wage theft with heavy fines. These fines are a major disincentive. Could the city instead lead an educational campaign? Often employers and employees just don't know all of the laws. The city could publish and distribute something annually to be posted in all businesses. This would be very cost effective and accomplish the same goal.

Thank you,

Rebecca Robbins
Woodstar Cafe
60 Masonic St.
Northampton, MA 01060